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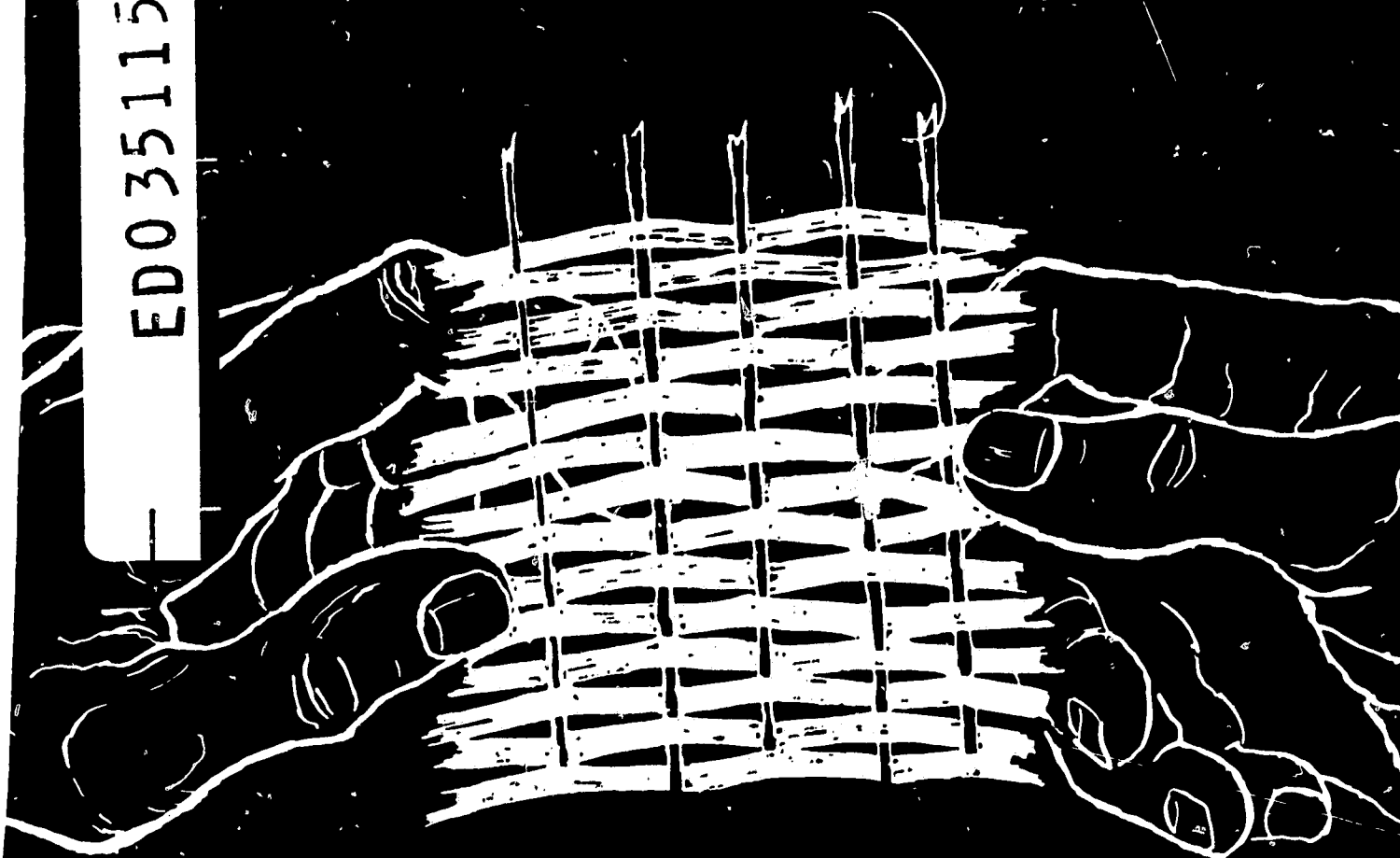
ABSTRACT

The one-act play dramatizes the problems and possibilities of the rehabilitation of the mentally ill, particularly the discharged patient from state mental hospitals. It creates characters with familiar prototypes, underlining a situation in which a discharged mental patient finds a job with the help of a rehabilitation counselor and encounters problems in getting along with his co-workers. To help make the lesson more learnable and usable, a comprehensive discussion guide is supplied with the play.  
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PLAYS FOR LIVING

A division of the Family Service Association of America



# THE PICNIC BASKET

A PLAY ABOUT THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION  
OF THE MENTALLY ILL

by  
*NORA STIRLING*

Written for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation  
U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE  
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## **PLAYS FOR LIVING**

A Division of

Family Service Association of America

# **THE PICNIC BASKET**

BY NORA STIRLING

*With a specially written discussion guide*

BY DR. SALVATORE DiMICHAEL

*Written and produced for*

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation  
U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

FAMILY SERVICE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

44 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

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### PURPOSE OF THE PLAYS

The plays written and produced under the auspices of PLAYS for LIVING - FSAA are intended to give dramatic emphasis to the situations in the community which need recognition, greater understanding, discussion, and, at times, action. These plays are written by professionals from the theatre, in conference with authorities in the various fields under consideration, so that the content of the plays will be sound. In any community there are many points of view. These plays are not ends in themselves but are written to stimulate discussion. PLAYS for LIVING believes that such discussion offers opportunity for exploring divergent points of view and leads both to clarification and new comprehension of the problem presented.

## THE PLAY'S THE THING

### FOREWORD

by Mary E. Switzer

Director, U. S. Office of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

From the beginning of time man has illuminated his problems and expressed his dreams and his joy in their fulfillment through plays. The drama, in one form or another, is as old as man. From the days of the miracle plays to the present **PLAYS for LIVING**, the theatre has been an exceptionally effective way to tell a story, to teach a lesson, to preach a sermon, and in all cases, to create a dramatic situation for all to enjoy. From time to time through the centuries drama has been used as direct therapy. Psycho-drama reached acceptance in our own day, and is an effective method of treatment for mental illness.

In a way, all great plays teach a lesson of one kind or another. They illuminate character; they instruct us in the deep interplay of person-to-person; they give a more effective means of identification with a problem than almost any other means of communication.

It is not, therefore, a surprising thing that we in rehabilitation should seek this current method of telling the rehabilitation story. **PLAYS for LIVING**, which has been a successful effort of the Family Service Association, has a number of successes to its credit. We hope the latest one will be "**THE PICNIC BASKET**", written by Nora Stirling, to dramatize the problems and possibilities of the rehabilitation of the mentally ill, particularly the discharged patient from our State mental hospitals. This is good drama; it creates characters whose prototypes we all know, and it underlines the essentials of any situation where a discharged mental patient may find himself on his road back to full life.

The play is, of course, primarily a lesson play, but I think it is also an enjoyable one-act drama. To help make the lesson more learnable and useable, a comprehensive discussion guide is supplied with the play.

It is hoped that throughout the country, in local mental health associations and in local rehabilitation associations, people wanting to try their drama wings will put on these little play-lets for their fellow citizens. If we can have hundreds of performances of "THE PICNIC BASKET" in the next year in this country, we can look forward to a really revolutionary attack on the rehabilitation of the mentally ill.

The cooperative effort that makes this possible is the vocational rehabilitation Federal-State program and its collaborator in the voluntary field, the Family Service Association of America.

### CAST

- STAGE MANAGER - Either a man or woman with a friendly manner.
- STANLEY BURNS - The shop steward in the bill posting department of a medium sized office. In his early thirties.
- MAX TREE - A co-worker, in his early thirties.
- WALTER POWELL - A State Rehabilitation Counselor, in his forties.
- RUSSELL COOK - Another worker, a former mental patient, in his thirties.

### COSTUMES

- STANLEY - White shirt and tie.
- MAX - White shirt and tie. Enters carrying sports coat.
- WALTER POWELL - A business suit.
- RUSSELL - A business suit.

### PROPS

#### ON STAGE

4 tables (or small desks).  
5 chairs.  
1 medium length knife,  
kitchen type, placed on  
desk No. 3.

#### OFF STAGE

1 woven picnic basket off right.

#### EFFECTS

Phone bell off left.

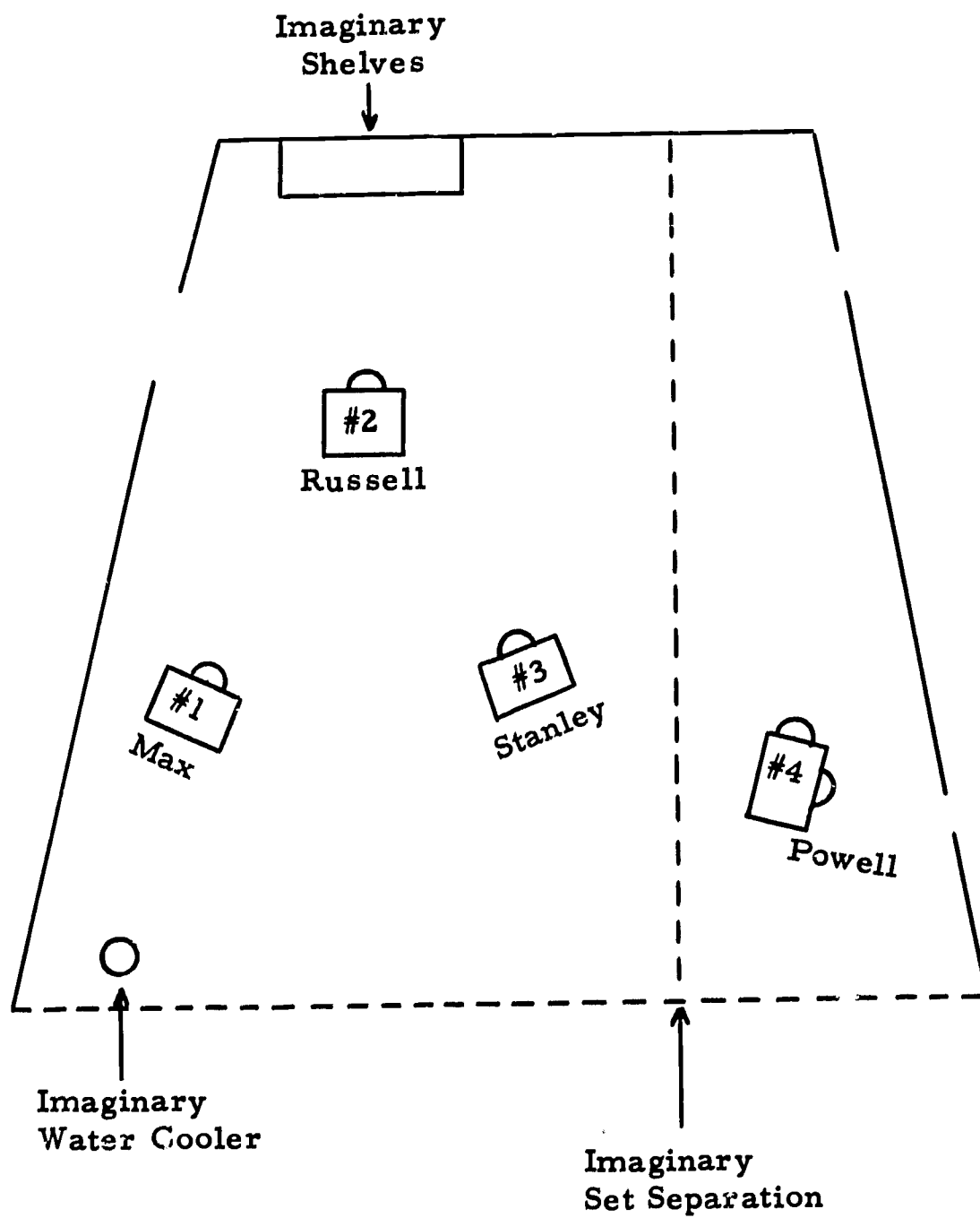
### IMAGINARY PROPS

Water cooler, down stage right.  
3 posting machines, on desks of Max, Russell and Stanley.  
Bundles of cards of accounts tied with twine.  
Shelves up center stage.  
Imaginary character; Holman, employer.



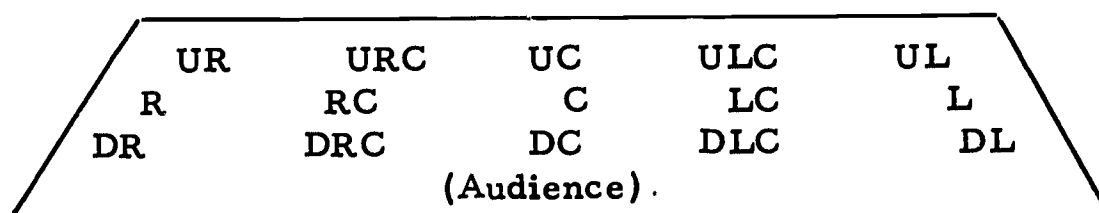
## SETTING

The play is presented without scenery. The furniture is placed according to the diagram below. If the playing area does not have built-in entrances, as indicated, folding screens may be used to conceal the actors when they are off stage.



## PRODUCTION NOTES

Stage directions are always written from the actor's viewpoint, in indicating "right" and "left". "Downstage" means the section nearest the audience, and "upstage" the section nearest the back wall of the playing space. The chart below will be helpful in making clear the different stage areas referred to in the script. Abbreviations are used as follows: R, right; L, left; C, center; D, downstage or down; U, upstage or up.



A "cross" refers to an actor's moving from one part of the stage to another. All crosses, unless otherwise indicated, are made "below" (downstage of) any other actors standing in the path of the movement, rather than "above" (upstage, in back of) that person.

When imaginary props are indicated in the script, use of actual objects in rehearsal is recommended where possible to help the actors acquire convincing pantomime technique. A posting machine, if not obtainable for rehearsals, should at least be watched in action, so that the actors may re-create the motions accurately. They must always be careful to keep in mind where the machines are placed, to avoid moving "through" them.

In several instances, Russell moves directly from the posting office to Powell's office, and vice versa. To make the transition clear-cut, he should move to the imaginary line separating the two sets, remain motionless for a count of 2, then cross quickly into the next area, thus establishing the feeling that his first lines or actions in the ensuing scenes are a continuation of some previous conversation or action.

During Russell's scenes with Powell, Max and Stanley, as they continue with their work, must be careful not to distract the audience. The large movements of working the posting machines

should be avoided in favor of quiet writing of figures at the desks.

The actors will find it helpful to read the accompanying Discussion Guide, which contains many clues to the characters they portray. However, the following is a brief analysis of each part which can help the actor bring the reality to each role that is vital to the believability of the play.

### THE CHARACTERS

#### STANLEY BURNS

He is a solid citizen and in reality the hero of our play, the person the audience must identify with more than any other. Honest, reasonable, human, his quiet strength and good sense have given him a position as a leader among his co-workers. If Stanley says it's so, it's so. But like many of us, in some areas he has accepted the prejudices of others as proper -- until he is forced to examine those prejudices to see if they meet his own standards of how a person should act toward his fellow human beings. The decision he makes is the major climax of our play. The actor playing Stanley should avoid seeming to throw his weight around; he is simple and modest at all times, and during his period of uncertainty at the end, the audience should feel his deep bewilderment and desire to figure out -- and do -- the right thing.

#### MAX TREE

In no sense should he be considered the villain of the play. The audience must understand him for what he is, a man who reflects the prejudices of the circles he moves in. He defends these beliefs, not out of any deep personal conviction, but because it makes him feel part of the group from which he seeks approbation. He has enough intelligence to realize that Stanley is smarter, and the leader -- so Max seeks constantly to reap the approval of the group through Stanley. Gossip, and what he considers problems, he enlarges to Stanley with the constant hope of acceptance. Actually, he has personality problems of his own. He is the kind of man whose first approach to the solution of any conflict is a physical one. The actor should never over-do

his toughness. The lines themselves, if spoken in a not-too-educated voice, will carry the characterization. And at the end he should suggest that Max is not himself convinced, but is merely bowing to the leadership of the stronger character, albeit unwillingly.

#### RUSSELL COOK

Introverted from his childhood on, Russell found early in life what he thought would be his niche -- a somewhat insignificant job which he could do well. Because of his fears and lack of self-confidence, he had never made many friends, so that when he lost his job, he had nothing to hang onto. Quickly he fell into the abyss of the depression which sent him to the mental hospital. There he learned to understand himself and his problems -- and this new job is the test of whether he can keep himself on the road back. Fear of discovery that he has been a mental patient lives with him constantly and colors his success at his work and his relations with his co-workers. Yet, when the discovery is made, it is almost a relief and he finds unexpected reserves of strength with which to appeal for understanding. Since, by definition, Russell is a negative, colorless personality, he offers a challenge to the actor and director, who must make him interesting anyway. He should be played by an actor with plenty of personal force and vitality, who deliberately plays "down", rather than by a soft, quiet type who would compound the negative qualities. The actor's native force must come through in the final scene when Russell, wakened by the word jerk and all it tells him about Max, suddenly breathes in new strength and self-confidence.

#### WALTER POWELL

He believes in the important, human job he has to do for and with his clients. With the vitality and sincerity of a salesman he can sell the potential of Russell Cook to an employer. Yet, in his conduct with Russell himself, he never tells Russell what to do -- he simply opens up avenues of thinking which Russell can pursue to make his own decisions about himself. This requires a gentle authority and the ability to draw his clients out of themselves. Russell is easy with Powell as he is with no other human being. He regards him as a friend as well as a wise and understanding counselor.

### THEME OF "THE PICNIC BASKET"

Rehabilitation of a human being is not alone the job of a professional expert and a hospital. If we who have never faced the crippling of mind or body have any feeling for our fellow men, we must realize that we have, as individuals, the power and the responsibility to help these handicapped succeed in their struggle back into the world of the living. They must have our understanding and our acceptance. Without it, they fail.

## THE PICNIC BASKET

AT RISE: THE STAGE IS EMPTY.

STAGE (ENTERS FROM RIGHT AND CROSSES CENTER)

MANAGER: Good evening. And welcome to a performance of "The Picnic Basket". This play was written by Nora Stirling, sponsored by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation of the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. It was directed by \_\_\_\_\_, and produced by the PLAYS for LIVING Division of the Family Service Association of America. (MOVES RIGHT. INDICATES BY HAND) The action on our stage takes place in two different offices. The desk on your right is in the office of a State Rehabilitation Counselor. The rest of the stage represents the posting machine room of a medium sized business concern. Thank you. (EXITS DOWN RIGHT)

STAN: (ENTERS FROM R TO #1 DESK, PANTOMIMES PUTTING BUNDLES OF CARDS ON DESK, CROSSES TO #3, SITS, AND AFTER ARRANGING ADDITIONAL CARDS, STARTS TO WORK WITH POSTING MACHINE)

MAX: (COMES IN, R, WITH SPORTS COAT. TO UR) Hi.

STAN: (THEY SEE EACH OTHER EVERY DAY. HE HARDLY LOOKS UP) Hi.

MAX: (PUTS COAT ON BACK OF R CHAIR) Boy, look at that stack of invoices. Business must be getting better. (CROSSES UC TO BEHIND STANLEY'S CHAIR) Have a good weekend? (SLAPS STANLEY ON BACK)

STAN: (JUMPS IN PAIN) Ouch!

MAX: (LAUGHS) Oh, went to the beach, huh? Sun never bothers me. I can stay out in it all day. The gals sure go for a good tan.



STAN: I bet.

MAX: Marie and I were at the beach too. Where were you?

STAN: Down at the far end, away from the crowd.

MAX: Oh, why? There's nothing doing down there.

STAN: We like it.

MAX: (MAX CROSSES TO WATER COOLER, DR) Who'd you take? Your girl? (PANTOMIMES DRINK)

STAN: And her sister.

MAX: Say, when are you two gonna get hitched?

STAN: Oh, I dunno.

MAX: No foolin', why don't you marry the girl?

STAN: Oh, for Pete's sake, Max. I'm crazy to marry her, if you must know.

MAX: (GENUINE ASTONISHMENT) You mean she won't have you? Go on.

STAN: Believe it or not.

MAX: She nuts or something?

STAN: Aw, Max, shut up. She's just scared of marrying anybody right now. She got hooked up with a very wrong guy once and it's made her kind of leery of men. I figure if I just don't crowd her -- give her time to get over it . . . (GOES BACK TO HIS WORK)

MAX: Oh. Well. (HAVING GOT THE ANSWER, GOES TO #1 DESK. A PAUSE) Pass me the knife. The way they tie up these bundle of cards! (STANLEY LAYS KNIFE ON #2 DESK, MAX REACHES

ACROSS FOR IT. A NEW TOPIC) Say, I saw old man Holman out at the beach yesterday. You ought to've seen the chick he had with him, too. (HE IS CUTTING TWINE ON CARDS)

STAN: (HARDLY LISTENING) Mmm?

MAX: Crazy old galoot, fooling round with kids young enough to be his daughter.

STAN: She have red hair?

MAX: Yeah, how'd you know?

STAN: It was his daughter. I've seen the whole family.

MAX: Oh. Well, he gives me a pain anyway. (HE SITS AT #1 DESK) Why can't he get a move on, filling that place? (A NOD AT THE EMPTY DESK BETWEEN THEM) I'm fed up doing two guys' work. You're shop steward, can't you needle him?

STAN: Oh, it hasn't been so long. Give him time to get the right guy. (THEY SETTLE DOWN TO WORK WITHOUT SEEMING SUDDENLY TO STOP)

POWELL: (AT CUE "YOU'RE SHOP STEWARD" HAS WALKED ON LEFT, BELOW HIS DESK. NOW HE SPEAKS EASILY TO AUDIENCE) Here's where I come in. My name's Walter Powell. I'm a vocational rehabilitation counselor for the state. (SITS BACK AGAINST DOWNSTAGE EDGE OF DESK, ARMS CROSSED FOR A CHAT) That means I help disabled people get ready to go back to work. I have a client, Russell Cook, who needs a job, and so when I heard about that opening for a posting machine operator (GESTURES TOWARDS TWO MEN) I hurried right over. (MOVES SOMEWHAT TOWARDS CENTER, ADDRESSING "HOLMAN" URGENTLY, FACING OBLIQUELY RIGHT) Mr. Holman, I believe Mr. Cook is the very man for you. He's had ten years' experience as a mail clerk, and he's a careful,



conscientious worker who -- . . . No, he wasn't fired, he was squeezed out of the job by automation. That was several years ago, and as a result he had an emotional upheaval that put him in the hospital for a while . . . (WITHOUT APOLOGY) Yes, mental hospital . . . No, a kind of depression. He lost all confidence in himself. But that's over now. The hospital and I worked hard with him. We tested his aptitudes and gave him job training, and though he's still diffident and needs encouragement, he's ready to work again now . . . Danger? Risk? Mr. Holman, you run less risk with Russell Cook than with almost anybody you could hire. Most job applicants, what do you really know about them -- their background and character? We can tell you all about Cook's. Family -- decent, hard-working people. Character -- absolutely honest and reliable. Capability -- as good as anybody else. All he needs is a little time to get the hang of things . . . Oh, about eight weeks . . . No, I wouldn't advise telling the other employees he'd been hospitalized. Many people have foolish ideas and prejudices. But don't worry, he'd be the last person to cause any trouble. And I'll be seeing him right along. If things don't work out I'll help him get another job . . . You'll take him? Oh, that's great. I'll send him right over to see you. (ON "RIGHT OVER" RUSSELL COMES ON, SHAKES HANDS WITH STANLEY, NODS TO MAX, WHO RESPONDS, AND GOES TO #2 DESK, WHICH STANLEY HAS INDICATED, HANDING HIM CARDS. RUSS SITS AND STARTS TO WORK TENTATIVELY AND ANXIOUSLY. POWELL MEANWHILE GOES ON, WATCHING HIM AS HE SPEAKS) It was pretty tough at first, after two years of not working -- even with all the help he'd been given. But that wasn't the real trouble, it was meeting all those strangers, wondering if they knew, scared they'd find out about him. (POWELL HAS BEEN MOVING BACK TO HIS DESK AND NOW SITS IN CHAIR L) However, he's been there six weeks now -- only two more weeks till the job's permanent -- and he seems to be getting along better . . .

RUSS: (HAS STARTED STIRRING DURING LAST SENTENCE, LOOKS ON DESK FOR SOMETHING. RISES) Just want to look up a couple of code numbers. (HE GOES OUT UL)

MAX: (IN DISGUST) Again? (TO STANLEY) That jerk spends all his days looking up code numbers.

STAN: Well, you know. He's careful.

MAX: Careful! He does everything ten times and then checks to see if he's done it at all. I told Lustig the other day.

STAN: Told him what?

MAX: Whose fault it was we weren't getting out our quota of invoices this month.

STAN: Aw, what'd you want to go to the supervisor for?

MAX: Do I want to get the blame? Do you?

STAN: Was Lustig crabbing?

MAX: I figured he would be. I wasn't going to have him telling the old man I was laying down.

STAN: It takes a while for anybody to shape up. At least Russ is quiet and doesn't make trouble.

MAX: (GOING BACK TO HIS WORK) OK. If you want to do his work you can. (ENDING THEIR CONVERSATION, THE TWO MEN LAPSE "OUT" OF THE SCENE)

RUSS: (ENTERS UL, GOES TO POWELL AND SHAKES HANDS)

POWELL: Well, Russell, it's nice to see you again. How are things going?

RUSS: (DISCOURAGED) Oh, I dunno. (SITS L OF DESK)

POWELL: What's the matter?

RUSS: It's the job. I'm so slow. (GETS UP, MOVES TO FRONT OF DESK) And I'm scared all the time I'll make a mistake.

POWELL: Is it the mistake you're scared of, or what people will think of you if you make one?

RUSS: Both, I guess.

POWELL: Well, take the mistake -- what would be the worst that could happen if you made one?

RUSS: Oh, it would be awful. Invoices would go to the wrong addresses, and -- (VOICE DIES)

POWELL: And what?

RUSS: I guess that's about all. But I'd feel terrible, just the same.

POWELL: Because of what other people thought of you, or of what you thought of yourself?

RUSS: (CROSSES UC) Actually, I guess it's mostly what I'd think. I'd be so ashamed. As far as the others are concerned, it's already about as bad as it could be.

POWELL: What others?

RUSS: (CROSSES D TO DR OF POWELL'S DESK) Max Tree chiefly. He's just about had it.

POWELL: How do you know?

RUSS: The way he rides me all the time. I know I could do the work. I'm getting better at it. It's what I learned in the hospital. But when a guy calls you a jerk and a dope all the time -

POWELL: (RISES, CROSSES TO RUSS) For some time I've been thinking about this Max Tree -- sounds as if he had a few problems of his own.

RUSS: Max?

POWELL: Have you ever noticed that people who are always criticising others and calling them jerks and dopes may be secretly afraid they're jerks and dopes themselves?

RUSS: Maybe you're right.

POWELL: This is just a guess, but does he ever talk about "cutting people down to size?"

RUSS: (FACE LIGHTING UP WITH RECOGNITION)  
Oh yes! Often!

POWELL: Whose size did you think he is cutting them down to?

RUSS: I dunno. (MOVES UR OF DESK) I never thought.

POWELL: Think it over.

RUSS: But he's right about me. I am slow and stupid.

POWELL: (GOES TO CHAIR L AND SITS) Does that other chap-- does Stanley ride you too?

RUSS: (MOVES IN TO DESK) Oh no, he's a swell guy.

POWELL: (A SMILE) You see?

RUSS: What?

POWELL: When Max criticizes you, calls you a jerk and a dope, it's because you're so slow and stupid. But when Stanley doesn't, it's because Stanley is such a swell guy.

RUSS: (SMILES SLIGHTLY IN RECOGNITION OF HIS INCONSISTENCY) I never thought of that.

POWELL: When you were in last time, we talked about your life outside the office. How are things getting along there?

RUSS: (SITS ON DR CORNER OF DESK) Oh, just the same. I go home every evening and read, that's all. My mother worries. She says now I'm OK, I ought to try to meet some girls. But I dunno, I don't have anything to say to them. I know we've talked about all this, but I'm always scared of letting out where I've been.

POWELL: (NODS) Sure. We all have something in our lives we're sensitive about. Do you have any conversations with the men at the office?

RUSS: Oh, they have their private jokes. They know each other so well.

POWELL: They didn't always, did they? Weren't they probably once strangers themselves?

RUSS: Maybe. But anyway, I'm so dull.

POWELL: You think you have to be witty?

RUSS: (GETS UP FROM DESK) I could never be witty. But at least . . . good company.

POWELL: It's nice to be witty and lively, I know that. But don't you think that when the chips are down, what people value most is someone they feel comfortable with -- that they can trust?

RUSS: (SLOWLY) I guess so.

POWELL: How do you think you'd rate that way? (RUSSELL LOOKS AT HIM WITH HIS FACE LIGHTING UP IN

TIMID HOPE. POWELL RISES) Don't write yourself off too cheap, Russell. You know what sort of a friend you'd be. Just give yourself a chance to be one.

RUSS: (FACE HAPPIER, SHAKES HANDS) OK. I'll try. (MOVES UC) Goodbye. And thanks. (MOVES TO UR SHELVES ARRANGING INVOICES. POWELL SITS L, WATCHING, OUT OF SCENE)

STAN: (AS HE AND MAX COME TO LIFE) Did you fellows see the game on TV last night?

MAX: (WORKING AT MACHINE) I couldn't. The in-laws were over.

STAN: (PAUSE) Did you, Russ?

RUSS: No.

MAX: Why?

STAN: Oh, it was just funny, that's all. Cris Hoagy was up at bat in the fourth --

MAX: That guy! What a clown!

STAN: Yeah. Well, the bases were loaded with one out, see. And what did Cris do but fall for a slow one and top it to the pitcher. And he threw it to home and the catcher doubled him at first. They showed a close-up of his face, and boy, I nearly died.

MAX: The faces that guy makes! He slays you.

STAN: Yeah. (THEY GO ON WORKING. A PAUSE)

RUSS: (HAS BEEN LISTENING AND WORKING UP TO THE EFFORT. COMES SLOWLY DC) Er . . . (HE DRIES UP)

STAN  
AND MAX: (LOOK UP, WAITING) Yeah?



RUSS: (LOSES HIS NERVE, SITS, DESK C) Nothing.

MAX: (IGNORING HIM. TO STANLEY) I heard there was going to be a new stadium out at Oglethorpe. You read anything about it?

STAN: No. I'll believe it when I see it.

MAX: Me too. (SILENCE, WHILE THEY WORK)

RUSS: Er . . . (THEY WAIT AGAIN)

STAN  
AND MAX: Yeah?

MAX: Come on. Cough it up.

RUSS: (NERVOUS BUT DETERMINED) It was nothing except -- speaking of those faces Cris Hoagy makes -- I knew a fellow once. Playing ball, he had the funniest habit. Every time he pitched he spat over each shoulder first. For good luck, I guess. It looked so funny.

MAX: I knew a guy did that, came from my home town. Murray McNulty.

RUSS: (PLEASED) Why, that's the fellow!

MAX: No kidding. He was a crazy galoot.

RUSS: He was, kind of.

MAX: You ain't kidding. (RISES, CROSSES TO UR SHELVES) Did you know he ended up in the bughouse?

RUSS: (FREEZING IN FRIGHT. A SHORT PAUSE) Oh?

MAX: (WITHOUT SPECIAL INTEREST) Where'd you know him? He was put away quite a few years ago.

RUSS: (CAREFULLY GOES BACK TO WORK) Oh . . . well . . . maybe it wasn't the same fellow.

MAX: With the same name and the same habit? (CROSSES TO BACK OF STANLEY'S DESK, PUTS CARDS ON HIS DESK)

RUSS: What name did you say?

MAX: Murray McNulty.

RUSS: Oh. This was -- Mike McNulty. What did your fellow look like?

MAX: Short. Dark. Kind of squinty-eyed. (CROSSES DR TO COOLER, TAKES A DRINK)

RUSS: It's not the same. Mike was tall and red-haired. (A NERVOUS LAUGH) Just goes to show how mistaken identities get started, doesn't it? I don't really keep up with baseball much. I was never crazy about it.

MAX: I like basketball better myself. And bowling. (PANTOMIMES BOWLING ACROSS STAGE) You bowl?

RUSS: No.

MAX: Play tennis? Golf? (COMES UP TO R OF RUSS'S DESK)

RUSS: No.

MAX: Nothing?

RUSS: I -- swim a little.

MAX: You ought to bowl. Good for you. (CROSSES TO STANLEY'S DESK, PICKS UP CARDS) Keep you in shape.

RUSS: There isn't any place since Palladino's alleys burned down.



MAX: What's the matter with the ones at Oglethorpe?

RUSS: Oglethorpe?

MAX: The ones at Oglethorpe Park.

RUSS: I don't know them.

MAX: (CROSSES TO UR SHELVES WITH FINISHED INVOICES, MAKES PILES) Don't know them! Where you been the last two-three years?

RUSS: (SUDDENLY TERRIFIED AGAIN) Oh. Oh, the Oglethorpe Alleys!

MAX: Ain't you ever seen 'em?

RUSS: Why . . . I don't know...

MAX: How could you miss 'em? Great big building right at the entrance of the park. Put up a year or so ago.

RUSS: Well, I tell you, I don't go in for bowling much.

MAX: But living right here in town -- ! (CROSSES TO #1 DESK, SITS)

RUSS: Why is that so strange?

MAX: With all there's been in the papers?

RUSS: I tell you, I'm not much interested in those things. I really only care about swimming.

MAX: But to go swimming you got to go through the park.

RUSS: I--I haven't been out in several years.

MAX: You been away?

RUSS: (CAREFULLY) No-o. I just didn't happen to. And I--I don't always read the sports pages.

STAN: (LOOKING AROUND) Where's the knife?

MAX: Here.

STAN: Say listen, Russ, I've got an idea. (RISES) You like swimming. (CROSSES TO #1 DESK, GETS KNIFE) My girl and I generally go to the beach on Sundays, and we take her sister quite often. (CROSSES BACK TO #3 DESK, CUTS TWINE OFF A BUNDLE OF CARDS) She's a very attractive girl, not pretty, but good company. Why don't you come along sometime?

RUSS: (TAKEN ABACK) Oh. Well, that's awfully nice, but . . . (VOICE DIES)

STAN: Why not? We'd be glad to have you. (CHECKS ONE LIST AGAINST ANOTHER AT #3 DESK)

RUSS: Oh . . . I'm not much on going out with girls.

STAN: (A SMILE) Listen, you don't have to be scared of Letty and Jan. They don't expect the champagne and caviar treatment. We may even have to go out on the bus this Sunday. My car's in the shop.

RUSS: I wasn't thinking about that. It's just-- I'm no good with girls.

STAN: (LAUGHING) What do you think you have to do, put on a comedy act or something? The girls don't go for that wise-cracking stuff. I tell you, they're real nice people. You don't meet too many like them round here.

MAX: Go on, why don't you? And you could drive 'em out in your car -- save 'em going in the bus.

RUSS: Oh . . . well . . . (RISES, CROSSES UP TO SHELVES) I haven't got a car.

MAX: What are you talking? I've seen you coming to work in one lots of times.

RUSS: That's my mother's.

MAX: Borrow it.

STAN: We don't need his car.

RUSS: (TO MAX) I can't.

MAX: She won't let you take the car for one day?

RUSS: I mean -- I haven't got a license. I let it lapse.

MAX: Oh.

STAN: It doesn't matter. The bus'll be OK. How about it, Russ? (CROSSES DR) We'd like to have you, no kidding.

RUSS: This coming Sunday, you mean?

STAN: Why not? (HE IS AT THE WATER COOLER, GETS A DRINK)

RUSS: Well, that's mighty nice. I don't know. I'm not sure if I'll be free. My brother and sister may have made some plans. Can I find out and let you know?

STAN: Sure. We'll be starting early, about nine. The girls like to go way down to the end of the beach away from the crowds. We usually take a picnic lunch. If we go on the bus I guess I can take it in my old duffel bag. (PANTOMIMES LIFTING DUFFEL BAG) And a rug. (CROSSES TO #3 DESK AND SITS)

RUSS: It sounds great. Well, I'll check and see if I'm free. Is that all right?

STAN: Sure. OK. You let me know. (HE AND MAX LAPSE INTO STILLNESS)

RUSS: (HURRIES ACROSS UL AND DOWN TO POWELL, SPEAKING AS IF POWELL HAD BEEN LISTENING)

What am I going to do? I don't see how I can get out of it.

POWELL: Do you want to go?

RUSS: Well-I-- at first I wanted to say I couldn't. But at the same time -- you and I've talked about this often enough -- I know I ought to. I ought to make myself.

POWELL: There's a distinction there. Do you just grimly feel you ought to go, the way you ought to go to the dentist? Or do you really feel that once you got over the first hurdle you'd enjoy yourself?

RUSS: (THINKS. SITS DR CORNER OF DESK FACING D) I don't know. I want to have friends. I don't really like staying home all the time. My family's very kind, but I guess that isn't enough.

POWELL: (RISES, CROSSES TO UL CORNER OF DESK) Then you feel you're missing out on something you'd really like to have?

RUSS: I don't know. Of course I feel -- safer this way. Not even trying. (AN APOLOGETIC SMILE)

POWELL: But it seems this time it's worth making the effort, doesn't it?

RUSS: I guess so. And Stanley would be the easiest person to try it with. He's been so swell right along. And the two girls don't sound like the sophisticated type. I never know what to say to people like that. As a matter of fact, the worst thing about this invitation is that it's for a whole day. If it was just for the movies or something where we didn't have to talk. But all day! (TURNS TO POWELL) What do you talk about all day?

POWELL: (CROSSES TO HIS CHAIR) They all know each

other so well, they won't need you to make conversation. (SITS) It really sounds like a fine chance to make some friends.

RUSS: (RISES, CROSSES UL) I'm sure Stanley asked me just to be kind. (TURNS D) I wish I could drive them out there, but I've been so stupid, not to get my license renewed. (CROSSES D TO R OF DESK) I wonder if there's anything else I could do.

POWELL: You'll take part of the lunch?

RUSS: Oh, sure. (TURNS, CROSSES TO POWELL) But that gives me an idea. Stanley was going to take it in his duffel bag. When I first went to the hospital I made baskets. Suppose I took them a picnic basket?

POWELL: That's a swell idea.

RUSS: I'll do it. (CROSSES U WITH MORE ANIMATION) You know, I'm really beginning to look forward to Sunday. (HE GOES BACK TO CENTER STAGE SMILING, LOOKS AT MAX, THEN STANLEY. HE PANTOMIMES STACKING PILES OF CARDS ON SHELF)

MAX: (ANNOYED, LOOKS AROUND) What are you doing?

RUSS: Just tidying up the stuff we've finished a little bit.

MAX: Hey. (GETS UP. CROSSES U TO R OF RUSS)

RUSS: What's the matter?

MAX: Look what you done. Mixed up your work pile with mine. (SUSPICIOUSLY) What'd you do that for?

RUSS: I was just -- tidying up. The stuff's spread out so there's no room for any more.

MAX: No you don't. You keep your pile over there, I'll keep mine here.

RUSS: What's the matter?

MAX: I turn out twice as much work as you do. You're not going to make Lustig think you're a ball of fire on my time.

RUSS: I wasn't trying to do anything like that.

MAX: You couldn't fool him anyway. He knows what's what.

STAN: Max, Russell wasn't trying to pull anything.

PHONE RINGS, OFF LEFT.

RUSS: That's for one of us. I'll go. (GOES OUT L)

STAN: You ride that guy too much, Max.

MAX: (CROSSES DR TWO STEPS) A-ah, he's a jerk.

STAN: Listen, he's slow but you never saw a more conscientious guy. (RUSS ENTERS UL SLOWLY)

MAX: What's the matter?

RUSS: (COMES SLOWLY TO #2 DESK, LOOKING WORRIED) Mr. Holman wants to see me. I'll be back. (GOES OUT UL)

MAX: (EYEBROWS RAISED) The boss wants to see him! (CROSSES TO UR OF #1 DESK) Well, well! I hope he gives it to him right between the eyes.

STAN: Aw, what for?

MAX: (CROSSES TO BETWEEN #1 AND #2 DESKS) He needs a good jacking up.

STAN: I think he's OK. And he did something that -- well, I don't know many people that would have gone to the trouble.

MAX: Yeh? (HE HAS CROSSED TO STANLEY, BETWEEN #2 AND #3 DESKS)

STAN: You remember the other day (RISES, CROSSES DR) when I asked him to join the girls and me at the beach?

MAX: Yeh.

STAN: Look what he brought this morning. (GOES OFF-STAGE R, BRINGS BACK BASKET) He said he felt so bad he couldn't drive us out that he brought this to take our lunches in -- (TAKES BASKET TO #2 DESK) Made it himself, believe it or not. (HE OPENS BASKET TO SHOW MAX) Look, knives and spoons and cups and everything.

MAX: (COMES OVER, UC. TAKES A LONG LOOK. SUDDENLY SLAPS THE TABLE) Oh, my God.

STAN: Huh?

MAX: (VERY EXCITED) I knew there was something screwy about that guy. And now -- that does it!

STAN: What's eating you?

MAX: I knew it! I knew it! My God, we've got to do something!

STAN: What's eating you?

MAX: Now listen. Put two and two together, see if they don't add up.

STAN: To what, for Pete's sake?



MAX: Listen to me! Remember that business about McNulty the baseball pitcher? After I mentioned he'd been in the nut house, how bugged Russ got, said, Oh, it wasn't that McNulty, and then he clammed up on us?

STAN: I didn't notice anything. (CROSSES DR TO L OF #1 DESK. CHECKS CARDS)

MAX: (CROSSES TO L OF STANLEY) Well, didn't you think it was funny he didn't know about the new bowling alleys at the park?

STAN: Not specially. He said he wasn't much interested in sports.

MAX: You believe everything you hear, don't you? I bet you've never given that conversation another thought?

STAN: No.

MAX: I have. It was all too damn fishy. (CROSSES TO CENTER FRONT OF DESK #2) He said he couldn't drive you folks out to the beach 'cause he'd let his driver's license lapse. Now you know people with cars don't just let their licenses lapse (CROSSES TO STANLEY) something happens to make them.

STAN: What are you getting at?

MAX: Where's he been the last two or three years, that's what I'm getting at.

STAN: Where's he been?

MAX: Rockmore State Hospital, that's where he's been.

STAN: (HE TURNS TO MAX) Oh no, Max, no. (CROSSES TO #3 DESK)



MAX: He saw Murray McNulty play ball, didn't he?  
(CROSSES L TOWARD STANLEY) That guy was put  
away years ago, it's the only place he could have.  
And this -- (SLAMMING LID OF BASKET) this is  
the pay-off. You say he made it himself. (COMES  
DL TO STANLEY) Well, everybody knows they  
make folks in bughouses do weaving and baskets  
and all that, and one time Murray's old lady showed  
me a basket he'd sent home. Same identical basket.  
That's what tipped me off.

STAN: There could be some explanation.

MAX: Like what?

STAN: (TURNS TO MAX) Maybe he worked there, teaching  
weaving or something.

MAX: You really believe that? (STANLEY CROSSES  
BELOW MAX TO DR, THINKING) Don't try to fool  
yourself. (GIVES A SHAKE OF HORROR, TWO  
STEPS DL) Ugh, it gives me the creeps. To think  
he's been sitting right here next to me! (CROSSES  
TO L OF STANLEY) Now! What are we going to do?

STAN: Do? (TURNS TO MAX)

MAX: You're shop steward. It's up to you to do something.

STAN: We have no real proof --

MAX: Are you kidding? You know we don't need any more  
proof. You just don't want to believe it.

STAN: No, I don't. He seemed like a nice guy. And I felt  
sorry for him, he seemed so kind of lonely.

MAX: Now don't go soft. This guy is dangerous. (MOVES  
UL, LOOKING AT EXIT) We've got to get him out  
of here.

STAN: How?

MAX: (TURNS TO STANLEY) Go to Lustig. The old man if necessary. If you don't, I will.

STAN: Now hold on, Max, don't rush things. We've got to think.

MAX: (MOVES TO STANLEY DR) Why? It's an open and shut case. A guy's crazy. He's working right next to me. Any minute he may go berserk. He's got to go. Everybody in the office would feel the same way, you know that.

STAN: Wait, Max, don't rush things. Let's reason it out. (THINKING OUT LOUD, CROSSES BELOW MAX TO DL) If he was in the hospital . . . if he was crazy once, does that mean he has to be now? Wouldn't they have examined him at Rockmore before they let him out?

MAX: (CROSSES TO R OF STANLEY) They'd probably say they did. But you can't tell. You hear all the time about people let out, supposed to be cured, and then bang!-- Remember that case a few years ago, a guy came home, seemed perfectly OK. Then one morning, he was making himself breakfast and his mother told him not to spill the bacon grease. And he took a mop handle and beat her to death. You can't tell. The least thing can set 'em off.

STAN: (HAS NO ARGUMENT) But . . . I've got to think.

MAX: This is no time to fool around. You don't like having this crazy guy working here any better than I do. Admit it.

STAN: (TURNS TO MAX) Well, I don't like it. It makes me feel funny. And I'm thinking about the girls in the office, too -- is it safe for them. But there's just a chance we're mistaken, and until I'm dead sure --

MAX: What'll it take to convince you -- having him stick a knife in somebody? (JEERING) Or are you going to wait till Sunday and try him out on the girls?

STAN: (SHARPLY. HE'S FORGOTTEN THIS) Oh, my God! Oh, I can't. (MOVES BELOW MAX TO DC) But suppose I do call the trip off, and it isn't true. I feel so sorry for the guy. When he gave me that basket, it seemed so --

MAX: Sorrier than you'd feel for your girl if he went berserk out on the beach?

STAN: Oh, Letty'd die. Even if he acted perfectly normal, if she ever found out she'd die. But I want to be fair!

MAX: (CROSSES UP R BEHIND #1 DESK LOOKING AT UL EXIT) Listen, I think you're crazy, but I'm willing to go along. Just answer me this -- are you just waiting to be convinced, is that all?

STAN: I guess.

MAX: And if you are, then you'll go to Holman and demand that he fire him?

STAN: (UNHAPPILY HESITATING) Oh-h . . .

MAX: You won't? (CROSSES DC TO R OF STANLEY) Then are you willing to take the risk of knowing the people here are in danger and not do a thing to protect them?

STAN: Oh, let me think.

MAX: A mad dog's loose in the office, and you take time to think!

STAN: (TURNS ON MAX) Oh, shut up.

MAX: Listen, Stanley, you're shop steward and folks here think you're a tin god. But if you don't do something, I'm going to. And it won't be so sweet and gentle either. (HE STOPS, HEARING RUSSELL COMING. CROSSES TO UR OF #2 DESK) Here he

comes. (HE STANDS TENSELY WATCHING RUSS ENTER. STANLEY MOVES TO #3 DESK, WORKS ON INVOICES. RUSS CROSSES TO #2 DESK, SEES BASKET, LOOKS AT STANLEY, THEN MAX. HE SITS DOWN TO WORK, TENSE AND UNHAPPY)

MAX: Did you see the boss?

RUSS: (PAUSE. HE REALIZES MAX HAS SPOKEN TO HIM, LOOKS UP) Oh. Yes. (GOES BACK TO WORK)

MAX: No bad news, I hope?

RUSS: N-no.

MAX: Quite satisfied, is he?

RUSS: With me?

MAX: Who else would he want to talk to you about?

RUSS: Well... (RISES, CROSSES TO #3 DESK, GETS KNIFE, BACK TO DESK AND SITS)

MAX: Perfectly satisfied, is he?

STAN: (CROSSES UL UNHAPPILY) Max, it's none of your business.

MAX: Oh yes, it is my business. (MEANINGLY) And yours too, Mister. (TO RUSS) You didn't tell us -- is he perfectly satisfied?

RUSS: (FORCING HIMSELF TO GO ON WORKING, CUTTING TWINE ON CARDS) Well, he did say there had been a few complaints.

MAX: Complaints, huh? Now what in the world could anybody complain about you for? Did he tell you what about? Or could I guess?

RUSS: (IN A LOW VOICE) Maybe you know.

MAX: (WORKING HIMSELF UP MORE AND MORE) Oh!  
(CROSSES IN TOWARDS RUSS) You're laying it  
at my door, are you?

RUSS: (RETREATING) He didn't say who it was.

MAX: I didn't like your insinuation. But I'll tell you this  
-- I ain't said a word, but I could've if I wanted.  
I just don't run to the boss with every little  
complaint.

RUSS: I didn't say you did.

MAX: (LEANS ON #2 DESK OVER RUSS) There's one  
thing I could go to him about-- and it ain't such a  
little thing either. (COMING CLOSER, MENACING  
HIM) I could tell him I don't like working with  
sneaks and liars.

STAN: Max!

MAX: (TO STANLEY) Do you?

RUSS: (RISES AT L OF #2 DESK, FACES MAX) Sneaks?  
(HE HAS THE KNIFE IN HIS HAND)

MAX: Sneaks and liars, I said. (CROSSES ABOVE DESK  
TO L OF #2 DESK FORCING RUSS SLIGHTLY DL)  
I like people to be on the up-and-up . . .

RUSS: I don't think -- (STANLEY MOVES UP AROUND L  
OF #2 DESK, TO DR OF #2 DESK DURING  
FOLLOWING)

MAX: (FORCES RUSS, HIS BACK TO AUDIENCE, DL)  
. . . not sneaking round, covering up who they  
are, what they are.

RUSS: I don't know what you mean.

MAX: You ought to know -- unless you're not very bright. That couldn't be it, could it? (HE GIVES RUSS A DERISIVE JAB WITH HIS HAND, MOVING HIM DL) -- that you're not quite all there?

RUSS: (PULLS AWAY TO AVOID HIM) Don't!

MAX: (PURSUING HIM) Could that be it? (ANOTHER JAB)

RUSS: (PLEADING) Don't.

MAX: (ANOTHER JAB) Could it? (RUSS, KNIFE UNCONSCIOUSLY STILL HELD IN HIS HAND, BACKS AWAY DL) Could it? That you're fresh from the loony bin and don't know the time of day?

RUSS: (DRAWS BACK WITH A CRY OF PAIN, THROWING UP HIS HANDS TO HIDE HIS FACE) Stop!

MAX: (TRIUMPHANTLY TO STANLEY) See that? Now, what'd I tell you? (TO RUSS) Drop that knife. If you want to fight, use your fists, you jerk!

RUSS: (AT THE WORD "JERK", RUSS LOOKS SHARPLY AT MAX, THINKING, REMEMBERING. GRADUALLY, FROM A CRINGING ATTITUDE, HE STRAIGHTENS INTO ONE OF DIGNITY, AS HE SEES MAX WITH NEW COMPREHENSION. QUIETLY) Jerk. You call everybody jerks, don't you? (NOW MASTER OF THE SITUATION, HE LOOKS AT THE KNIFE, CONSCIOUS OF IT AT LAST. HE WALKS UC TO HIS DESK AND LAYS KNIFE ON IT) I couldn't use a knife on anyone. (TURNS TO MAX) You're not going to get me to fight.

STAN: (UR. HE HAS BEEN WATCHING BREATHLESSLY. NOW HE DRAWS A DEEP, RELIEVED BREATH) Boy, oh boy! Max, what do you say now? Russ, you don't know what this guy's been saying. That you were at Rockmore, and that the least thing



and you'd flip your lid again. (COMES DL TO RUSSELL) As a matter of fact, I'm ashamed to say I almost went along. There were some queer circumstances that seemed to dovetail. But I apologize. If I ever saw anybody that didn't flip! The way Max went at you -- if anybody'd gone at me like that, I'd have let him have it.

RUSS: (QUIETLY, AFTER A LONG PAUSE) Thanks, that's nice of you. But I was.

STAN: You were what?

RUSS: At Rockmore.

STAN: (UNBELIEVING) As a patient?

RUSS: Yes.

STAN: You were? But -- why did you hold out on us? Why didn't you tell us?

RUSS: I just did.

STAN: Well, yes. But before-- why didn't you tell us before?

RUSS: Stanley, when Max first came here, did he make a point of telling you about sicknesses he'd had? Did you tell him about yours?

MAX: What's that got to do with it?

STAN: But this is different. You mean you were really sick once but now you can act like this?

RUSS: Is that too hard to believe? They cure a lot of cancer these days -- and tuberculosis -- and things that used to scare us to death.

STAN: But people who have been in mental hospitals -- I always thought --

RUSS: They're human beings, Stanley. They get sick -- and more and more of them get well. Then what?

STAN: (HE'S TURNED AWAY FROM RUSS IN INDECISION) Well, someone ought to -- to -- (HE PAUSES, THINKING) They ought to -- (RUSS, FEELING DEFEATED, TURNS AND PICKS UP THE PICNIC BASKET) What do I mean by "they"? (HE TURNS AND SEES RUSS WITH BASKET, MAKES HIS DECISION. TWO STEPS TO RUSS AND HE TAKES THE BASKET FROM HIM GENTLY) I guess I don't know very much. But I can learn. (RUSS SEES HE'S WON. HE STRAIGHTENS UP AND SMILES. A LITTLE EMBARRASSMENT BETWEEN THEM) Er -- Russ, by the way, I meant to tell you. The garage says I can have my car by Sunday. So, if you can be ready by nine o'clock, we can pick you up.

MAX: (SURPRISED) You still going, Stan?

RUSS: (HOPING BUT FEARFUL) You're sure you're going? You're sure your plans haven't changed?

STAN: (STAUNCHLY) Certainly not. And the girls will be crazy about your picnic basket. (QUIETLY, REALIZING WHAT HE'S SAYING) Letty especially.

RUSS: Are you going to tell her where I made it, Stan?

STAN: Why should I? That's your business, Russ. You may want to tell her someday -- or you may not. It doesn't make any difference. Does it, Max? (SILENCE. CROSSES DL TO MAX) Does it, Max?

MAX: (BELLIGERENTLY) I don't know.

STAN: Well, I do. You try to drive this guy off his rocker, and when you don't succeed, you won't even admit you're wrong. If anybody'd done that to you, you know you would have blown your top.



MAX: All right, all right.

STAN: And Max, unless Russ wants to tell them, nobody's going to know anything about all this, except us here in this room. (CROSSES UC TO RUSS) The boss, does he know?

RUSS: Yes.

STAN: Well, I guess I got something to tell him. He said there'd been complaints?

RUSS: He said he'd give me two more weeks.

STAN: Well, maybe I can fix that up. (A GLANCE AT MAX) I'll tell him I think whoever it was complained might not really have meant it.

RUSS: (RELIEVED) Golly, that would be swell. The job kind of had me down before. But I know how to do it, and I really think I can handle it now.

STAN: Sure you can. In fact, I think I'll go see him right now. (CROSSES DL TO MAX) Max, you want to come along?

MAX: (STARTLED) Huh?

STAN: You want to come along? (IN A STEELY VOICE) Or do you want to come along?

MAX: OK. (AFTER SOME THOUGHT) OK.

STAN: (CONFIDENTLY WAITS FOR MAX TO GO TO DOOR. FIRMLY) Max, after you. (MAX GOES OUT UL SULKILY. STANLEY GOES UL, TURNS, GRINS AT RUSS) See you. (GOES OUT)

RUSS: (CROSSES DIRECTLY DL TO POWELL WHO RISES FROM CHAIR) -- and then the two of them went down to the boss and Stanley put in a real plug for me. Wasn't he swell?

POWELL: Sure was. And you -- you're going to be OK now, aren't you?

RUSS: Yes, I think so. But if it hadn't been for Stanley -- and everything you did for me --

POWELL: Russ, I like my job -- especially when things like this happen. But it was Stanley who gave you what you needed most. You'll find other people like him, too, Russell. Oh, there'll always be some Max's, but as time goes on, I believe you'll find more and more of the Stanleys, ready to give a fellow a break. Goodbye, Russ. (HE EXTENDS HIS HAND)

RUSS: (HE SHAKES IT) Mr. Powell, goodbye. (CROSSES TO UR EXIT) Thanks -- thanks a lot. (HE GOES)

POWELL: (HE TURNS TO THE AUDIENCE, COMING DC) I guess it's true -- that no man is an island -- sufficient unto himself. As time goes on, I'll be seeing a lot more Russells, and I hope there'll be a lot of Stanleys to help them along. I like to think they represent more and more of us. (HE GOES OUT RIGHT)

(AFTER AUDIENCE APPLAUSE STAGE MANAGER ENTERS DOWN LEFT)

STAGE  
MANAGER: And now I'd like you to meet the members of our cast. (INTRODUCES EACH CAST MEMBER BY NAME OF LOCAL ACTOR PLAYING PART. AS THE NAMES ARE CALLED, THE ACTORS ENTER AS FOLLOWS, Stanley, played by \_\_\_\_\_. (HE ENTERS FROM UL AND TAKES PLACE LC BEFORE DESK #3)

Max, played by \_\_\_\_\_. (HE ENTERS FROM UL AND TAKES PLACE TO R OF STANLEY)

Russell, played by \_\_\_\_\_. (HE ENTERS

FROM UR AND TAKES PLACE RC IN LINE WITH  
OTHER TWO)

And Walter Powell, played by \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(HE ENTERS FROM DR AND TAKES HIS PLACE R  
OF RUSSELL. THEY ALL BOW TOGETHER AND  
EXIT DR FOLLOWED BY STAGE MANAGER)

## GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS

by

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### Values of Discussion

The discussion by the audience, after the play has been presented, is an essential part of the total experience. The discussion helps to heighten the personal impact of the play, to provide expression for the feelings and reactions which have been stirred up. The audience is encouraged to clarify their ideas, explore the varying points of view, and arrive at new comprehension of the problems presented. There are many important potential messages to be drawn out of the performance. It has more to offer than the usual play. On most occasions the audience is accustomed to see and enjoy the dramatization with nothing more. However, THE PICNIC BASKET is not an end in itself but is intended to stimulate discussion. Before the play is presented, the audience should be told that they will be invited to participate and share their observations.

### General Purposes

The discussion leader may keep in mind certain general purposes. The play should help people to realize they need to know more about the mentally ill. They may appreciate better the current prejudices toward the emotionally recovered and the extent of their own personal biases. They may come to see that unwittingly they have created false stereotypes of the people overtaken by various mental ills. They sometimes see them as people capable of great violence. They may begin to question their fixed notions and comprehend that each person must be considered on an individual basis. Perhaps, the discussion will shake the previous feelings of fear and begin to displace them with more enlightened sympathy. The play could stimulate a greater sense of objectivity, and bring to mind some of the important factors in a person's environment which stand in the way of fuller recovery. The audience may express ignorance or misunderstanding, and the discussion will serve to bring those out into the open where they can be handled constructively. In effect,

too, the audience may be stirred to see the human values of the rehabilitation program and the community's responsibility in the successes and failures of the agency's clients.

### Theme of Play

The general background of the play deals with the problems which beset a person recovering from emotional illness. The person has been treated and discharged from a mental hospital. He is trying to re-enter the normal stream of community living. His efforts to succeed in a suitable job have great meaning to him. Whether he will succeed depends upon many things and people -- himself, his family, neighbors, employers, fellow-workers, the jobs available, recreational activities, religious worship and other affiliations.

The central focus of the dramatization is the varying reactions of fellow-workers and supervisors to the disclosure that one of the workers has been in a mental institution. To such a person the occasion of trial and crisis may come at any time, often-times without warning. These occasions may arise as he works, plays, relaxes, and participates in small or large groups in the community. The fact is that each member of the audience has had, and will have, many occasions when he encounters a person who has had a history of emotional illness. The theme of the play deals with a matter of real and not merely speculative importance. Of course, some situations have greater import to the ex-patient and his fellowmen, and such a situation is a new job.

### Role of Discussion Leader

Just as the play is a means to an end, so too should the discussion leader serve the audience to explore, clarify and seek new meanings of the general theme. The leader is a catalyst in stimulating free expression and creative thinking. He is in some respects like an artist who seeks to bring out the best in the audience. He will have to be resourceful in starting and keeping the discussion moving. Where possible, the leader should try to engender a progressive feeling of sharing in the ongoing product being created by the group. The discussion should have the quality of being natural, that is, unforced, unrehearsed,

and a pooling of true feelings and attitudes. The members of the audience should be encouraged to commit themselves to the spoken ideas.

The leader is not a teacher, nor is he committed beforehand to arrive at certain facts and conclusions. The approaches which the audience takes cannot be predetermined; each group will show a character of its own. The leader will help to heighten the emotional impact of the play, to make it a social experience not easily to be forgotten. All of this is to be done in a helpful but somewhat unobtrusive way. With some preparation, and the desire to be helpful, the role of the discussion leader is not difficult.

A good opening might be to put the problem of mental illness in perspective. For instance 17 million people have some well-defined mental or emotional disorder. More than half a million patients are in public hospitals for the mentally ill. More than half of our hospital beds are occupied by mental patients; mental patients in hospitals out-number those with all other diseases combined. Wages lost through mental illness run \$60 million a year; public assistance costs, \$32 1/2 million and total cost about \$4 billion. So this is our nation's leading health problem.

#### Prospective Audiences

The play can be given before many different kinds of groups. Probably, it will be most suitable for the general public with civic and humanitarian interests, such as community clubs, church groups, professional associations, alumni or alumnae associations, union memberships, employer or employee groups, personnel managers, and the like. As we have said, the major purpose is to encourage discussion. This will take substance and shape according to the background and experience of the viewers.

It may be more natural if the discussion leader has some association with the group before which the play is shown. Otherwise, the leader should learn as much as he can about the group so that he can readily identify its special viewpoints.

Since the discussion will be influenced by the special experiences



of the audience, the expressed observations will be expected to take on the viewpoints of the group. A professional group of counselors may be more concerned about the role of the counselor and specific techniques in his dealings with employers and fellow-employees. On the other hand, personnel managers may raise questions about industrial policies, problems of staff morale, hiring and re-hiring practices. Union groups may raise questions about acceptance of ex-hospitalized persons as employees and fellow-members, about trial periods for employment, and whether information about previous hospitalization is appropriately private or should be divulged to fellow-workers. Women may give voice to opinions about dates with the emotionally recovered, or ways to include them in social activities. The play may also be considered for presentation before certain recovering mental patients to foster more understanding and self-insight. The families of such patients would comprise another desirable audience. Whoever the audience, the more they can speak of matters in which they are personally involved, the better.

#### Other Suggestions

Preparation for the role of discussion leader may involve two things: (1) becoming acquainted with the script of the play; and (2) being ready to assume an appropriate attitude. The latter was covered in the early part of this guide. The former may be done either by reading the script, or by seeing it in one of the final rehearsals or better, both methods. In this way, the leader is more at ease about his role and able to catch or reflect certain points made by members of the audience. Moreover, the pre-experience with the play helps one to follow it at the actual performance with a feeling of familiarity.

Before the performance, the audience is told in a simple, straightforward way that a discussion period will follow.

After the play, the leader may say a few words to introduce himself, if that seems necessary. The aim is to create a friendly atmosphere, one in which people wish to speak their minds and share ideas. There is no set way to start the discussion. You may tell the audience that you are sure they have many reactions and observations. After a brief introduction, it is well to be patient until someone "breaks the ice". Once the



discussion starts, you will find that the audience is ready, even eager, to have their say in the proceedings. If it seems necessary to start the discussion, you may wish to use a few general questions, such as:

- "How did the play particularly impress you?"
- "Was this episode true to life?"
- "Which character did you particularly like?"
- "What are your main reactions to the characters?"

Sometimes the audience will need a little time to react, or there will be pauses after a point seems to have been made with widespread satisfaction. The leader should try not to be anxious, and to press. To provide continuity, and to give the audience a chance to think of new ideas, it may be well from time to time for the leader to rephrase briefly the general tenor of the remarks. When the speaker is too low, the leader gently should encourage him to talk louder so all can hear. If the speaker is still inaudible to the group, the leader should restate the viewpoint briefly so that all have the feeling of being in on all that is said.

The leader should discourage, in polite and tactful ways, the reactions that propose pat answers with a cut-and-dried flavor. The objective is to keep the discussion open, to give the flavor that there are many possible viewpoints and proposed solutions. Some questions which may help here are:

- "What do some of the rest of you think?"
- "Does someone see it a little differently?"
- "I can see how you feel but others may have a different viewpoint."

The leader should try to cultivate and maintain a pleasant atmosphere. When it is appropriate, the leader may take a remark with good natured humor. If a person criticizes another sharply, the blow should be softened.

One should expect some comments about the artistic qualities of the script, or the production, or the acting. People are accustomed to making such evaluations and should not be stifled. Sometimes, the absence of a real actor to portray the employer is a source of annoyance. Some people would like to have the counselor talk to a real and not an imaginary character on the

stage. The audience usually realizes these matters are incidental. After a few remarks, the participants will turn to other points. As a matter of fact, to make the play easier to produce, the author has deliberately kept down the number of actors and props.

An interesting focus for spirited reactions is the attempt to answer the question, "Who is the 'hero' and the 'villain' of the play?" As the audience struggles for the answer or answers, their views on emotional illness come more clearly to light. Some will show preference for the counselor, others for the unseen employer, and there will be advocates for the emotionally recovered person who is struggling to establish himself more firmly. Actually we sought to give prominence to the "Stanleys" as the sympathetic, helpful people in our society, who even out of partial ignorance are willing to give any fellow beings the benefit of the doubt. These "Stanleys" are like most of us, a little uncertain at first, sharing the prevalent social prejudices, but with a "heart that is in the right place". The latter quality makes it possible to learn, to convert prejudice into increasing enlightenment, and thus to give the most important support which helps the ex-patient to meet the crisis and become a better person for it.

With some audiences, questions may be posed about the portrayal of the counselor's role. During the discussion period, it is not desirable to have a precise or complete statement of his functions, or of the work of the State-Federal rehabilitation program. The leader should encourage comments and observations on the basis of the role of the counselor and agency as the audience sees them. It is recommended, however, that a representative of the rehabilitation program be present as a quiet observer. Occasionally the discussion leader may want to call on him as a resource person. If the play and discussion should engender interest in the activities of the State vocational rehabilitation program, he may arrange to appear at another meeting of the group.

The play does not offer the "ideal solution". It brings up the problem to our full attention and gives a stimulus to think about it more deeply and seriously than before. There will be different circumstances for each ex-patient and different employers and employees. There is no pat solution to be drawn. The discussion leader may help each member of the audience to consider anew

what he might do as a neighbor, fellow employee, relative, professional worker or average citizen.

Besides the individual values to be derived from the play and its discussion, there occasionally may arise a group desire for action. Many things need to be done by civic-minded people if the rehabilitation of the physically and mentally handicapped is to be expanded. When such proposals are made during the discussion period, it may be well to consider the matter enough to have the proposal clarified. Then it could be referred to the group for consideration at another meeting.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The play, produced by Hu Chain, and directed by Roy Franklin, was first presented on May 31, 1961 before a specially invited audience of rehabilitation specialists and other leaders in the helping professions, in the auditorium of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, New York City, with the following cast: John Thomas, Don Plumley, James Campbell and David Howard, with Andrew Mihok as stage manager.